# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“Thomas”**

**John 20:24-29**

 **May 9, 2021**

It was Easter Sunday and Jesus had risen from the dead. That evening he had appeared to the disciples where they were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. “Peace be with you,” he had declared, and he had showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. But, one of the disciples was missing from the meeting. I invite you to turn with me to John 20:24-29

One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), was not with the others when Jesus came. They told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he replied, “I won’t believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side.” Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. “Peace be with you,” he said. Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don’t be faithless any longer. Believe!” “My Lord and my God!” Thomas exclaimed. Then Jesus told him, “You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me.”

In his encounter with Thomas, Jesus is revealed as the One who comes to us in our times of faithlessness and experiences of restlessness, and gives us his peace. God has often revealed himself to me in this way, as the One who sees me in my struggle and does everything to help me find faith and rest. I’d like to share with you about one such time.

It was my freshman year in college. The year had begun disastrously with the death of my girlfriend, caused by a drunk driver. For the first time in my life I came face to face with deep sorrow and heartache, with a profound sense of loss, and I blamed God. The faith of my childhood was based in what I had experienced in a safe and loving family with a strong belief in God passed on to me by my mom and dad. Now, that faith was being tested. How could God allow this to happen? How could he stand by and let me experience such pain? I found my faith slipping and I turned away from God. Like Thomas, I declared: “I won’t believe.” But, as I soon came to realize, he had not turned away from me. While my mind was saying to me, “Don’t believe in a God who can allow this to happen,” my heart was becoming increasingly restless. While my intellect wanted to condemn a God who allows evil, my spirit was anxious within me. While I was rejecting the faith of my younger years, I was becoming aware of a deep emptiness within.

Some months later I was invited to attend a Christian college retreat. I would have declined, given I was no longer interested in being a Christian, but the retreat was being held at Eagle Lake where I as a boy had attended summer camp and I had fond memories of the place. So, I decided to go. And, as I listened to the speakers and my fellow students talk about their experiences of God, I felt the restlessness grow within me. One night I couldn’t sleep, so I got up and began walking around the lake, guided by the light of a nearly full moon. And, as I walked I thought about the changes in my life of faith. On the one hand, I was trying to justify to myself that my dismissal of God was legitimate, but on the other I felt an almost physical heaviness and total absence of wellbeing. And, then I did something I hadn’t done in months – I prayed. I don’t remember the words of my prayer. I can’t even tell you if I spoke out loud or just in my mind. But, I began to pour out my pain to God, the pain of a disappointed faith and the pain of a restless heart, and something began to change within me. I sensed a new confidence in God beginning to build in me, and I experienced a peacefulness that I hadn’t felt in a long time. It was the presence of Jesus, comforting and encouraging me, and by the time I finished my walk around the lake and returned to my bunk, I knew that God had found me anew.

How often do you find your faith slipping because of something that has happened to you? How often do you find yourself restless, unable to be at peace with yourself, or others, or God? It is human to doubt and be anxious, but we don’t have to live that way. We don’t have to face our doubts and fears all by ourselves. We can call for Jesus. We can rely on the presence of the One who calls himself our Shepherd, our Protector, our Friend. Jesus was there for Thomas because Thomas needed him. Jesus was there for me on my walk around the Lake because I needed him. And, Jesus will be there for you whatever your situation because he knows that you need him.

The next time something happens that has weakened your faith, that has made you restless within, take a walk with Jesus. Pour out to him whatever is going on in your mind, whatever you are feeling in your heart, and be ready for him to fill you with his peace.